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ABSTRACT

Noting that the achievements of boys have been the subject of growing concern in England for a number of years, this booklet indicates some ways to improve the achievement of boys in literacy. The booklet focuses on work in secondary schools and is based on visits to 14 mixed secondary schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas. It begins with a preface, acknowledgements, introduction, main findings, and setting the context. The three main sections deal with whole school initiatives, and with the policies and practices of special needs and English departments. The booklet concludes that, while there is no "magic bullet," the schools surveyed took clear measures to address a problem and they made a difference. Contains eight brief case studies and 16 references; appendixes contain a list of participating schools, and discussion of DARTS (Directed Activity Related to Text) and writing frames, "pyramid" projects, and the school library. (RS)

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Graham Frater

IMPROVING BOYS' LITERACY

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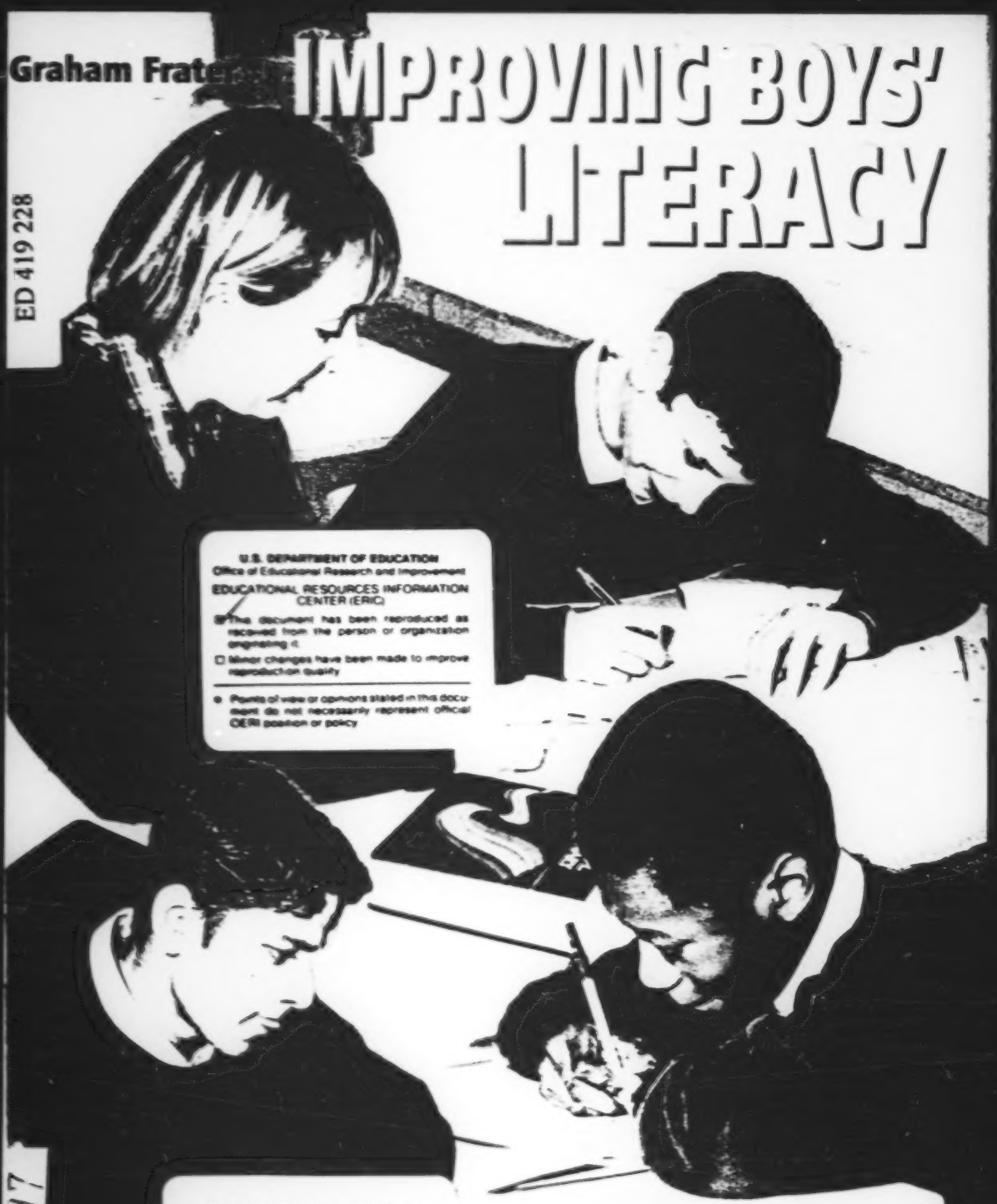

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The Basic Skills Agency

a survey of effective practice in secondary schools

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Preface

THE achievements of boys have been the subject of growing concern for a number of years. In part, the awareness was triggered by the HMI report on *Boys and English* (OFSTED, 1993). More recently concern, interest and action have gathered momentum because of the relatively poor performance of some boys in end of Key Stage tests and in examinations.

This booklet indicates some ways to improve the achievement of boys in literacy. It focuses on work in secondary schools and is based on a survey undertaken for the Agency by former HMI Graham Frater in the summer term of 1997. The aim of the survey was to gather examples of effective practice in boosting boys' literacy. This booklet complements the QCA publication on improving boys' achievement in English.

The picture is by no means all 'doom and gloom'. Underachievement in literacy of boys is being addressed explicitly in many secondary schools with energy and enthusiasm. Innovatory approaches abound, but much of what works is just common sense. Some concerns remain, particularly the problem of transfer of information between primary and secondary schools. Difficulties in this area mean that secondary schools often end up testing Year 7 pupils even though they have just been through end of Key Stage 2 assessment. Getting a systematic approach to transfer of information between the Key Stages needs to be an urgent priority. SCAA's (now QCA) guide to good practice on *Making effective use of Key Stage 2* assessments contains much useful advice in this area.

Finally my thanks go to Graham Frater for producing a readable and helpful booklet. I hope you find it useful.

Alan Wells OBE
Director
Basic Skills Agency

Acknowledgements

THE evidence for this paper was obtained from visits to fourteen mixed secondary schools. These were either identified by their local authorities or, following publicity from the Secondary Heads Association (SHA), they invited the Agency's consultant to pay a visit. In the end, the list of potential schools was too large for all to be covered. The Basic Skills Agency is most grateful for all the invitations. The participating schools are listed in Annex 1; their contributions were both generous and crucial.

The Agency is also most grateful for help and advice to Mr John Sutton and SHA, to Professor Tim Brighouse and to the English Advisers of Birmingham, Kirklees, Warwickshire, Leeds and Hereford and Worcester. Professor Ted Wragg of Exeter University, Dr Elaine Millard of Sheffield University, Mr Jim Graham of Keele University and Mr Peter Nightingale and Temple Moor School in Leeds generously shared papers with us.

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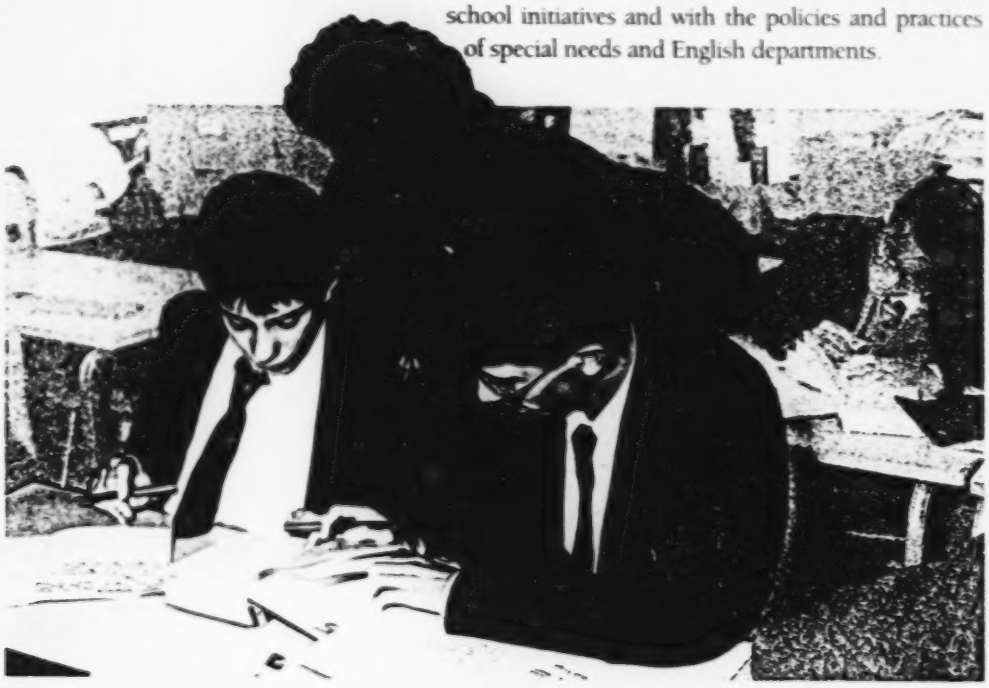
Introduction

THE main evidence for this paper was drawn from visits to 14 mixed secondary schools in urban, suburban and rural areas. Their pupils were aged 11-16, 11-18 or 13-18. Most were comprehensive, but two were secondary modern schools. No single sex schools were included, nor any selective schools only serving more able pupils. The survey evidence was drawn from interviews – chiefly with Heads of English and Special Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) – from classroom observation and school documentation. In schools with well-developed initiatives, the Senior Teacher in charge of a school-wide boys' improvement programme was sometimes the chief source of evidence.

Though never the source of case studies or quotations, some thirty Ofsted inspections of English and special needs undertaken between 1993-7 contributed indirectly to the paper. Meetings with teachers and advisory staff during in-service training or consultancy visits on some 200 further occasions since 1992 also augmented its thinking.

The paper falls into three main sections: it is concerned with whole school initiatives and with the policies and practices of special needs and English departments.



Main findings

THOUGH national concerns about boys' literacy are growing, the survey schools were unusually energetic and effective in addressing what they too regarded as a problem.

Target groups

Each school devised policies for three target groups of students: pupils with special needs; pupils whose literacy is below average, but who are not served by the special needs department; those of average achievement and above.

General and specific measures

The survey schools addressed boys' achievements through general policies and with specific measures. The most effective general policies involved all staff and paid close attention to teaching techniques. Special needs and English departments were particularly important in offering direct help with literacy. However, few schools had developed fully coherent policies that involved the active participation of all departments in attending explicitly to the specific literacy requirements of their own subjects.

Whole School policies

The whole school policies that were especially effective involved:

- *the scrupulous baseline testing of all new pupils;*
- *the targeting, monitoring and mentoring of individual pupils;*
- *explicit attention to teaching quality as a whole school issue;*
- *the explicit development, usually through in-service training, of the staff's awareness of boys' needs.*

Policies and practices for special needs

It is plain that at Key Stages 3 and 4, weak literacy presents special challenges to the individual pupil and to the school as a whole. The special needs teams of the survey schools addressed these challenges by adopting policies and practices for:

- *giving emphasis to intensive literacy teaching in Key Stage 3;*
- *using a variety of strategies to support pupils with difficulties (i.e. not relying on a single strategy or initiative);*
- *involving parents.*

Policies and practices for English

The distinguishing features of effective English practice for promoting boys' literacy included:

- *the provision of schemes for paired, silent and voluntary reading;*
- *explicitly teaching the advanced reading skills specified in the national curriculum for English;*
- *paying close attention to the structure of English lessons and to the structuring of pupils' thinking and writing;*
- *establishing both an ethos and expectations that effectively enlisted the co-operation of boys;*
- *providing teaching materials with a strong appeal to boys' interests and preferences;*
- *having clear objectives for the grouping arrangements used for English.*

Setting the context

THE survey took place at a time when public concern with standards of literacy was growing. A long historical perspective can show that such concern tends to be cyclical: it is often associated with the promotion or denigration of particular methods for the teaching of initial reading skills. Experience over the last 25 years also suggests that the results of reading tests that are ageing can provide a misleading trigger for public anxiety. Nonetheless, most of the head teachers and SENCOs in the survey schools noted that the average reading scores of their new entries of pupils had declined over a four or five year period – sometimes dramatically – and they were clear about the cause. They were less concerned about particular teaching methods than about the reduced time available for reading in an overcrowded primary school curriculum.

In addition, research for The Basic Skills Agency has demonstrated that the consequences of failing to become securely literate at school amount to 'a vicious circle of disadvantage and marginalisation' (Bynner and Parsons, 1997, p.17.). These disadvantages are profound, enduring and increasing.

> Whatever has gone wrong in education that led to these difficulties in the first place, *maintains its impact throughout adult life*.
>
> (Bynner and Parsons, 1997, p.79, my italics.).
>
> We have to conclude that *the difficulties associated with these problems have intensified over the years*.
>
> (Bynner and Parsons, 1997, p.83, my italics.).

The difficulties often include unskilled occupations, low pay, a lack of advancement and training at work, bouts of unemployment, poor health, depression, rented housing (as distinct from home ownership) and, for men, a divorce rate that is markedly higher than for those whose basic skills are secure (40% cp 16%. Bynner and Parsons, 1997, p.61.). If they are women, an early exit from work to look after children is also more likely. And if they left school at 16, adults with insecure basic skills tend to have more children than their peers and to have them earlier. Unsurprisingly, they form a group that is less likely to take part in public activities such as voting in elections. In addition, poor literacy is found in more than one in two prison inmates, but one in six in the general population (The Basic Skills Agency, 1994, p.16.).

The factors underlying the perceptible differences between boys' and girls' achievements in literacy are complex and varied. They probably include a biological dimension; they certainly include a wide variety of interlocking social elements. These range from early upbringing and play to the differing expectations about boys' and girls' behaviour – whether stated or unstated – of parents and teachers alike.

Whatever the causes, it is equally plain that schools can and do make a difference. Indeed, the current concern about boys has followed a period of more than ten years during which schools sought to promote the achievements of girls. The success of these equal opportunities initiatives reinforces arguments for the effectiveness of planned intervention. *The Gender Divide* (HMSO, 1993) shows that the average performance of girls, both in the national Key Stage tests and in GCSE (except in Physics), now outstrips that of boys. However, it is not so much that boys' achievements have deteriorated; rather, girls have improved at a faster rate.

That schools make a difference is also shown by the cyclical inspection system and in the literature of school improvement: both show that schools serving closely similar intakes of pupils can produce contrasting results. Though all were at an early stage in their programmes, the schools in this survey also showed that, without hindering the achievements of girls, boys' achievements in literacy could be improved and that the gap between boys and girls might also be reduced.

Whole school approaches

- baseline testing
- targeting, monitoring and mentoring
- teaching quality
- awareness of boys' needs
- groupings

Baseline testing

The survey schools demonstrated the value of baseline testing for each year's entry of new pupils. All the survey schools used some standardised tests, usually as a means of identifying pupils with special needs. The most common were standardised reading tests, often in conjunction with similar tests of spelling. Several schools used more elaborate forms of initial assessment, frequently as a means of measuring later progress and the value added by the education they were providing. The services of agencies that provide such assessment batteries are being used increasingly. No schools made significant use of national assessment data from the end of Key Stage 2: staff felt that they could not be relied upon and did not provide useful diagnostic information.

Where policy and practice were most developed, the evidence from baseline testing was used not only to identify pupils with special needs, but also to pin-point underachievement. Commonly, the results of a standardised test of general ability (usually non-verbal and/or verbal reasoning) were compared with information from the standardised reading and spelling tests. The sharpest discrepancies were usually among boys. Targeted help was offered to pupils whose literacy scores were significantly below their more general test results. Whether having special needs or not, they could be offered systematic support and encouragement, often on an individual basis.

Targeting, monitoring and mentoring

With the evidence of baseline testing to hand, several of the survey schools had developed lively initiatives for tackling underachievement for groups and individuals alike. These included:

- *at appropriate ages and on an individual basis, sharing assessment data, including predicted examination grades, with pupils and parents;*
- *assemblies where school and national examination results are discussed, including the trends of boys' achievements;*
- *occasional single sex assemblies, as above;*
- *regular staff meetings where the achievements of individual pupils are discussed in detail (with data sheets to hand that record potential, norms and progress);*
- *the use of mentors for targeted pupils (e.g. selected staff members, sixth formers and, where a business partnership scheme is in place, members of local companies);*
- *individual meetings between pupils and tutors, (or with appointed mentors for targeted individuals), reviewing progress in the light of explicit data;*
- *the award of merit certificates;*
- *the establishment of homework and revision clubs;*
- *the involvement of the local TEC, including as a provider of speakers, funds and mentors.*

Case Study I

11-16 comprehensive school

In October 1996, Ofsted reported that:

In English, there is a good rate of higher grade passes in GCSE especially in literature and the achievement of boys is remarkable.

Extract from Headteacher's paper for governors.

I asked all teaching staff individually to respond to this statement from me: 'I am frequently asked the following question by inspectors, headteachers, researchers etc – "how can you explain the massive improvement in boys' performance, bucking the local and national trend?"' Many of these responses confirm and reiterate the comments in my September report to you with regard to: the effective use of targeting – academically and pastorally – tracking, one-to-one reviews, after school revision lessons and the positive use of CAT scores and estimated grades. In addition, it was felt that there is a heightened awareness amongst staff, male students and their parents of the need to ensure that boys do not underachieve. The use of CAT scores, estimated grades and tutor conferencing in the lower school is helping to ensure that potential underachievers are spotted and helped. Also, many staff identified changes in the school ethos as being particularly helpful to boys. All of this has meant that the general peer pressure amongst boys is that it **is** 'cool to work'.

Case study II
11-16 comprehensive school

Resources for Y11 tutors for 1:1 interviews with pupils, following their mock-GCSE examinations.

You will have:

1. a full copy of the post-mock examination report grades for each member of your tutor group;
2. a set of red bar charts showing predicted grades which will be issued to members of your tutor group (predicted grade: the grade a student is likely to achieve if s/he continues to work as at present);
3. a duplicated copy of gray bar charts for all members of your form which includes the following information **not shown on the student's chart**:
   - NFER score – shown on the bottom left corner of each graph. This is the total SAS (Standardised Age Score) from the three tests taken by students when they were in Years 7 and 9. In general, the lowest score possible is 210 and the highest score is 390;
   - a target points score which is mainly derived from a consideration of NFER score, but which also pays attention to the student's current level of performance;
   - a target points distribution, such as 'All subjects at 6 points or above', or, 'Five subjects at 5 points, 5 subjects at 4 points'. (A* = 8, A = 7, B = 6, C = 5, D = 4, E = 3, F = 2, G = 1). If a student is predicted to get an unclassified grade this will not show on the graph;
   - some students' graphs also have a pencil asterisk which indicates underachievement when current performance is compared to potential. In these cases the target points total may look much higher than the current points total. These students have a lot of work to do!
4. a set of duplicated sheets entitled "Where can I improve?"

Teaching quality

Where schools had been most effective with boys' literacy, explicit attention had been paid, as a matter of overall policy, to teaching methods and techniques. English departments were often in the vanguard, but the developments were school-wide. Unsurprisingly, these were often schools that had been commended for effective teaching in a recent Ofsted inspection.

There were two clear strands to these developments:

- *all departments were encouraged to consider and develop their teaching approaches;*

- *the trend of the subsequently developed methods and techniques was both to:*
  - *increase the specificity of lesson delivery;*
  - *and to place greater responsibility on students for their own learning.*

Among the ways in which heads and senior management teams encouraged the development of teaching methods were:

- *the provision of a series of school-based in-service training sessions where teaching method was the centre of attention and where departments, in rotation, shared their approaches;*

- *the development of a tradition of classroom visiting, both within and between departments;*

- *the development of a programme of classroom observation* – quite distinct from the teacher appraisal scheme – *by heads of department and by the members of the senior management team attached to particular departments or faculties;*

- *at regular intervals, the posing of questions about teaching issues* for written answer and a given deadline *to all subject departments; such questions included:*
  - *how does your department seek to motivate pupils?*
  - *how does your department help pupils with note making?*
  - *how does your department make practical use of the assessments it records?*
  - *how does a typical lesson in your department begin?*

Among the teaching approaches that developed as a consequence of such encouragement were:

- *brisk starts to lessons, with objectives clearly shared and stated;*
- *a well maintained and appropriate pace;*
- *lesson endings that review what has been accomplished;*
- *varied activities in lessons in clearly phased stages;*
- *varying the seating arrangements and groupings during a lesson;*
- *high expectations related to specific tasks, combined with a non-confrontational approach to discipline;*
- *jig-sawing (dividing responsibility for parts of an overall task among groups of pupils, and making each group responsible for an outcome to the class as a whole);*
- *using grids, columns, spider diagrams, flow charts and other graphic aids to thinking and to the structuring of ideas;*
- *being explicit in setting and modelling written assignments, and providing effective examples of the task, style or genre required;*

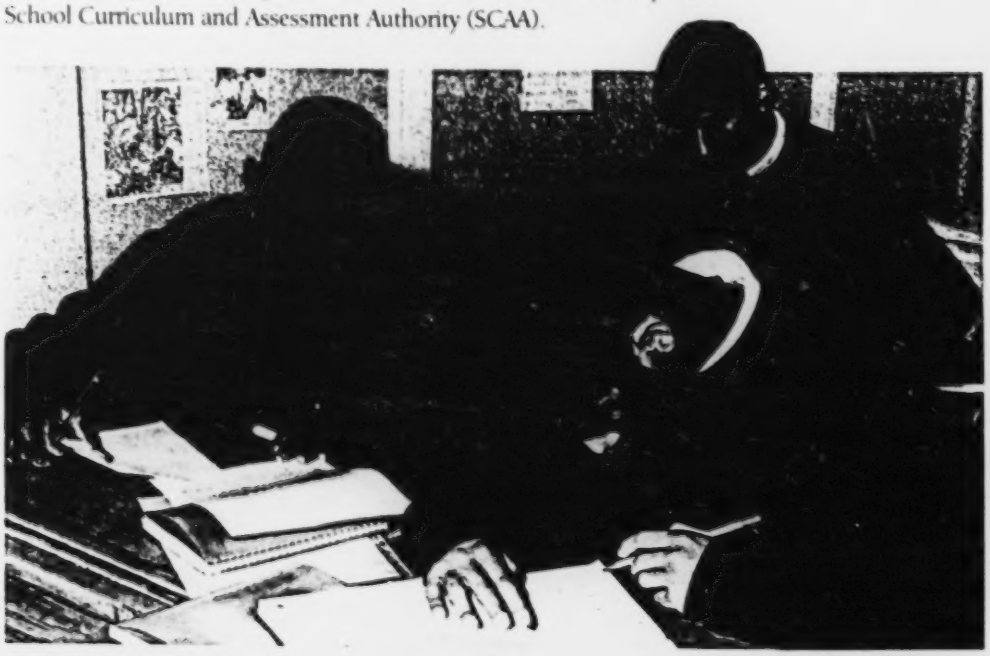
- *using systematic approaches to the handling and interrogation of texts and to guiding written work (see more fully under English departments section);*
- *sharing headings, structures and sentence stems for note-taking, but avoiding dictation or copying.*

It is a list that could be extended beyond endurance; however, a helpful set of criteria, and hence of further ideas, may be found in Ofsted's handbook for secondary school inspections (HMSO, 1995).

An awareness of boys' needs

The school in *Case Study 1* had set out less to boost the achievements of boys alone than to address underachievement in general; underachieving girls were offered the same kinds and amounts of support. As elsewhere, however, boys were by far the predominant underachievers and in-service training on the theme of the underachieving young male had also been provided for the staff. Similar in-service training had been offered in several of the other survey schools, sometimes by the same provider. Rather than leading to narrowly focused approaches, it had had the general, and probably more useful effect of raising teachers' overall awareness. Other schools achieved similar effects in different ways. In particular, small working parties of staff had sometimes gathered and presented research materials to their colleagues. There was also evidence of an increase in teachers acting as researchers. Two had recently completed MA degrees in which boys' underachievement had featured; both are now registered for doctoral study in much the same field.

It was with training, promoting awareness and the dissemination of well-founded evidence that LEAs could be especially helpful. Among the survey schools there was clear evidence of such effective support from West Sussex, Warwickshire, Kirklees and from both the Birmingham LEA and Birmingham's Roman Catholic Diocese. There was also some indirect evidence of the good influence of materials on boys developed in Shropshire and of those disseminated by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA).



Groupings

Whilst a culture of awareness and well-judged concern is plainly essential for addressing boys' achievements, what is the best form of organisation is much less certain, though there are some common threads. Among the survey schools, setting, mixed ability teaching, single sex teaching and structured mixed sex groupings were used; each school found success in its own approach. Most of this experimentation occurred in English classes and will be discussed in the separate section on English departments.

Nonetheless, setting was the most common form of organisation overall and a clear warning was sounded by a number of heads and teachers. Their message was that with the strictest forms of setting – on the basis of previous achievement alone – top sets would be nearly all female, the lower sets all male *and demotivated*.

- Boys must be able to feel in touch with the game.
- All our classes up to Year 10 are mixed ability and *they stay quite broad in Years 10 and 11*. Therefore, there are good role models for boys in the way girls work. *They are not dumped in bottom sets.*
- Broader band setting gives boys access to higher grades without attracting stigma.
- Boys are regarded as higher achievers (i.e. when placed in higher sets), so they achieve!

Most of the schools that used setting held similar views and took a broad-brush approach to their arrangements. There was no evidence in the survey schools that such arrangements hindered the achievements of girls. There was some evidence that when the setting arrangements that suit one subject are permitted to determine those for another, inequities and inconsistencies can easily arise.

Pyramid approaches

A further dimension (reported in Annex 3) was at an early stage of development in two schools, but promised well: it was the promotion of partnerships between primary and secondary schools that were directed towards the improvement both of boys' reading and of their behaviour and attitudes.

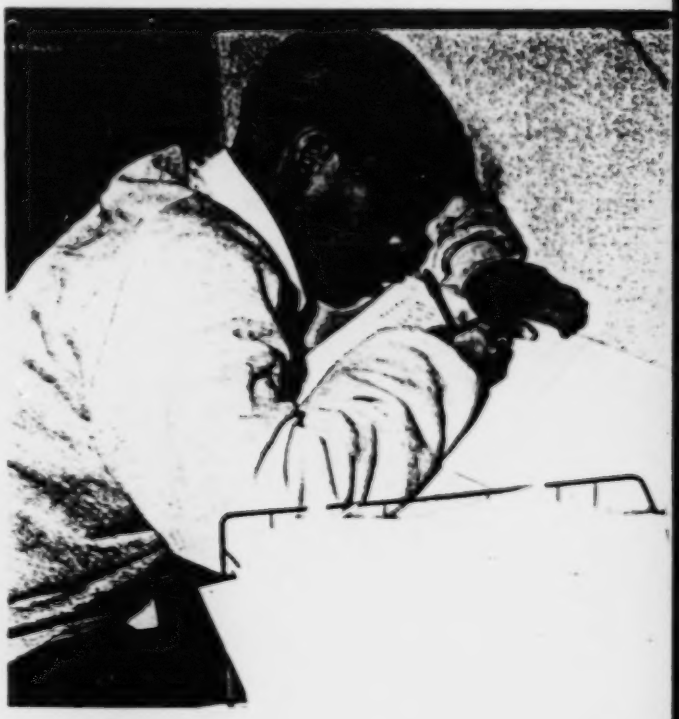
Special needs departments

- the challenge of poor literacy in the secondary school
- parents
- multi-layered support
- intensive literacy teaching

The challenge of poor literacy in the secondary school

It is common to find a twofold disjunction between the literacy acquired in the primary school and that required by the secondary. First, despite clear evidence to the contrary, the secondary curriculum assumes that the literacy of *all* its new pupils is secure. Secondly, except in English, most subjects immediately make heavy new demands upon that literacy. They provide a diet of reading material that differs sharply from the staple of the primary years: it is not predominantly narrative; it is formal in style; it seldom uses dialogue; and it does not always, or even commonly, follow simple chronological order. Moreover, most subject departments require pupils to write in these unfamiliar genres with little explicit instruction. In short, stiff new challenges face the pupil whose literacy is secure.

When a pupil with insecure literacy starts at secondary school, both he (commonly) and his school face a peculiarly severe set of challenges. The pupil has often reached a point where he is aware of his problems; he may also stand in danger of becoming anxious or disillusioned. At the same time, he must improve his basic skills and keep up with the growing demands that new lessons make on his old weaknesses. In turn, against the thrust of its timetable structures, against the clock, and still teaching all the new content of the National Curriculum, his school must help him to progress. If he does not catch up fast, he will become increasingly disadvantaged. As he grows older, there is every danger that if his problems persist, he will become demotivated, develop behaviour or attendance problems and fall further behind, or even drop out all together.



The reading difficulties of the SENCO's clients commonly began in their early years. They are often pupils who did not catch on to initial reading effectively and did not, therefore, read as much as their peers. As a consequence, they did not reinforce their insecure skills. Marie Clay has shown that, by the end of the first year of primary education, the number of words read in school by a proficient new reader can be four times greater than by a child who is making a poor start (Clay, 1991, p.209.). It is a gap that usually widens throughout the primary years (Sylva and Hurry, 1995, p.2). And the good reader, by reading at home, will widen it still further. Moreover, the secondary school curriculum is probably more steeply incremental than the primary. These are the challenging contexts in which the gap must be closed in Key Stage 3. No matter how explicitly the basic skills are taught again by the secondary school, pupils who have fallen badly behind in reading are not likely to consolidate their skills unless the school also provides for the reading practice they have missed.

To varying degrees, the special needs teams in the survey schools addressed these challenges explicitly.

Parents

All the survey schools kept parents informed about their children's progress and the help that they were receiving. Several went further and sought to involve parents directly. One SENCO regards parental support as a condition of successful progress. As soon as he has completed his screening tests, he calls a meeting for the parents of the failing readers in Year 7. He shares the problem with them. In particular, he seeks their co-operation in listening to their children's reading for not less than ten minutes every day. He also seeks their agreement to maintain frequent contact with him by means of a reading notebook that passes back and forth between home and school. He finds that the parents are usually grateful to be informed and that their support is crucial. Sometimes they are surprised and wonder why they had not been asked to help before. Though rare, he notes that when a parent refuses to co-operate little progress occurs and that his other strategies for supporting the child seldom thrive.

The daily involvement of parents is one means of addressing the backlog of reading experience noted above. It is perhaps equally important as a signal of parental support and concern. With or without holding an initial meeting, other survey schools followed similar strategies for seeking parental engagement; these included:

- *an advisory leaflet on hearing pupils read at home;*
- *communication about merit points awarded for effort and progress in reading;*
- *'graduation days' when pupils leave the reading support programme.*

Multi-layered support

A single strategy is unlikely to succeed with the interlocking difficulties that poor readers experience in the secondary school. The survey schools had all recognised the need to tackle literacy in a variety of co-ordinated ways. Some schools used many of the approaches listed below; others used a smaller selection. The strategies shown in **bold** were common to nearly all the survey schools. The approaches included:

- **withdrawal teaching for small groups;**
- **in-class support by qualified teachers and/or special needs assistants;**
- **paired reading schemes – using volunteer help from teachers, parents, school librarians, dinner time assistants, older pupils, adults from local partnership companies, and others;**
- **parental reading partnerships (*see Parents section*);**

Independence in reading is not achieved by learning letter-sound relationships. It is a much larger cognitive enterprise relating to thinking and understanding and governed by feedback and self-correction processes.
(Clay, 1991, p.254.).

- *one-to-one revision and review sessions, once a week (or once per timetable cycle), with a special needs assistant;*
- *using special needs staff to teach the bottom English sets;*
- *literacy software programmes for older students, used outside normal school hours;*
- *a 'buddy' system (in which an abler pupil regularly assists a peer);*
- *a lunch hour spelling club;*
- *a homework clinic that offers help with organisation and with interpreting set tasks;*
- *a lunchtime scrabble club (mostly attended by boys);*
- *a revision club.*

Case Study III

11-18 comprehensive school

A recent Ofsted report described this as a 'good school' and noted that:

(i) 'Those with statements of special educational needs make good progress throughout Key Stage 3' and that

(ii) 'The progress of lower attaining pupils is appropriately maintained in Key Stage 4 in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science'.

Special needs policy and practice

The overwhelming aim of the team is that pupils should make rapid progress and be able to proceed independently with the National Curriculum.

Some key features:

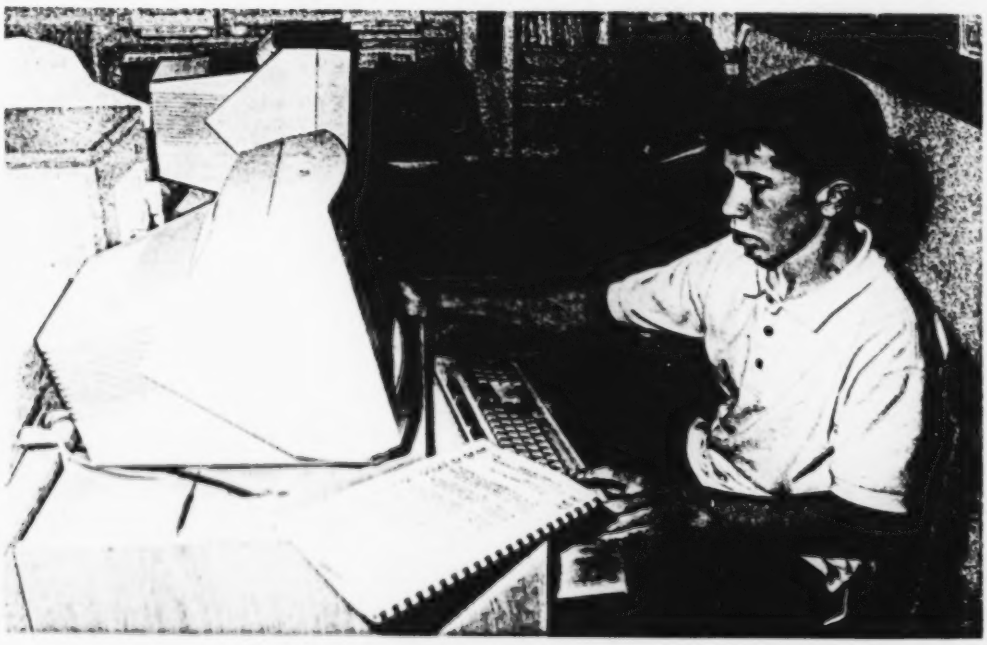
- **a core programme of withdrawal for group teaching for 10% of the timetable for the weakest readers;**
- for one lesson per 10-day timetable cycle, each pupil is given a one-to-one lesson with a member of the SNA team. This is a structured session of revision and review on the work he has covered during the cycle. Targets for the next cycle are also set. As reported, all pupils enjoy this lesson, not least for the individual attention it affords, for the reinforcement it offers and for the opportunity to acknowledge clear progress together;
- in-class support is also part of the scheme. Each supported pupil is assigned to the same SNA in supported lessons; the SNA and the host teacher are each provided with a simple diagnostic account of the problems experienced by each pupil on the register;
- a paired reading scheme, using older students (they have been offered an element of training by one of the SEN teaching staff) is also part of the provision;
- the progress of all pupils is closely monitored. **Pupils are discontinued from the withdrawal element on a termly basis, as they meet targets;**
- good record keeping is essential to the scheme. Regular testing is used and simple record sheets maintained.

Case Study IV
11-16 comprehensive school

The paired reading scheme run by the SEN team.

- **Offered to a wide group of underachieving readers who do not receive withdrawal teaching.**
- Sessions occur twice weekly, usually during registration or assembly.
- The supporting listeners include volunteer parents, dinner ladies and a selection of Y10 pupils, including some boys. An element of training has been provided by SENCO.
- **Texts are carefully chosen for the scheme and held in trays in the SEN centre – all have been colour-coded by levels to support progression.**
- Some grant money was obtained to buy the texts for this project.

Case Study IV was included especially to emphasise the importance of selecting texts effectively. Observation during inspection underlines the importance of planning paired reading carefully. In particular, a common weakness lies in the selection of inappropriate texts, often over-ambitiously, by pupils themselves. Well-judged guidance is essential; this applies equally to the home reading programmes with parents.



Intensive literacy teaching

The survey schools had clearly recognised the need to accomplish rapid progress for their new entries of weak readers. Most had made withdrawal teaching in Key Stage 3, – especially in Year 7 – central to their strategies. While withdrawal is not itself uncommon, several of the survey schools were relatively unusual in giving it such emphasis. In these schools, in-class support was usually a supplement to withdrawal teaching for the weakest pupils; elsewhere, it is common to give in-class help the greater emphasis.

> *As the child fell behind his or her peers, the prospect of catching up became increasingly remote.*
>
> (Bynner and Parsons, 1997, p.35.).

In-class help is undoubtedly the appropriate course for pupils with physical or sensory handicap and often for behavioural problems too. Where literacy is the chief difficulty, in-class help often has the drawback of being diffuse, contingent and inefficient: whenever plenary teaching occurs, the classroom helper is necessarily inactive. Too much also depends on the subject teaching that is going on in the lesson for the pupil's specific difficulties with literacy to be given close and consistent attention. Instead of promoting independence, it is help that can easily create dependence.

There are many practical difficulties to withdrawal work, the greatest perhaps is the disruption of the subject timetable. In effect, the most

vulnerable pupils face the added difficulty of catching up with the subject teaching they lose when they are withdrawn. Withdrawal work must, therefore, be as efficient and short-term as possible. The survey schools did not have the resources to provide the most tightly differentiated help, namely one-to-one literacy teaching. They worked with small groups, usually of about eight pupils, in brisk and tightly structured lessons on common tasks. Their chief emphasis was on reading aloud: they used carefully graded texts. Some schools used a commercially published kit in which meaning receives little attention. They wisely made up for this deficiency by emphasising discussion, by pre-viewing the vocabulary and its meanings, by using phonic and other cues when a pupil became stuck and by warmly praising pupils' self-corrections. Several schools set clear targets for these groups: they aimed for two years' gain in reading age before the end of Year 7. They were usually successful and sometimes made the gain more rapidly.

Case Study V

11-18 comprehensive school

For his programme of withdrawal teaching SENCO uses a commercial reading programme and a series of graded spelling books.

12 pupils present in observed lesson.

- Brisk pace to lesson and lively pupil participation.
- Group reading, with same text and passage shared by all. A clear gradient of progression through the passages in the scheme.
- **SENCO moderates the reading programme by laying stress upon meaning and expression, praising self-correction and intervening to reinforce a wide range of cueing strategies.**
- The reading phase of the lesson concludes with a brief review of progress.
- The spelling phase begins with plenary work and moves to self-paced working, with teacher intervention.
- An overall review of progress concludes lesson.

Case Study VI

11-18 comprehensive school

Literacy withdrawal programme for selected Y7 pupils: 'Booster sets'.

- Targets set for a period of 6 months at a time.
- 1 lesson pw in the library with regular borrowing and silent reading; individual pupils are also heard in rotation and their choices are guided.
- 1 lesson pw with a common outcome - drawn from the mainstream EN programme.
- 1 lesson pw of skills-based work: group teaching, individual computer work, whole class teaching.
- In selected cases, further withdrawal work is provided on a 1:1 basis, making use of student teachers.
- Close attention is given to providing booster sets with reading material that is carefully levelled on a clear gradient of progression.
- Non-fiction materials are used as well as fiction - often biographical material.

In addition, Booster Group students receive help through a paired reading scheme which draws on the services of sixth formers, parent volunteers, teachers in non-teaching periods and peers who have made good progress themselves. Booster pupils are also encouraged to read at home every day with their parents.

- context
- paired, silent and voluntary reading
- teaching advanced reading skills
- explicit attention to structure
- ethos and expectations
- boys' interests and preferences
- groupings

English departments

A note on context

English departments are concerned both with the basic and with the advanced skills of literacy. Pupils of average ability and above need to continue to develop their skills. Pupils with special needs generally attend English classes at least as often as they receive special help. And the English team is, in addition, chiefly responsible for tackling the poor literacy of a large penumbra of underachieving students who are not assisted by the SEN team. Just how severe these latter problems can be was illustrated by one 11-16 school where limited resources dictated that the cut-off point for SEN help was placed at a maximum reading age of 8.5.

The English departments in the survey schools were acutely aware of the problems of low achievement and of negative attitudes to reading and writing that many boys display. Most English teams were wholly or predominantly female. Since this was a survey of good practice, most were also unusually effective with boys, some outstandingly so.

Paired, silent and voluntary reading

> *I quickly learned that reading is cumulative and proceeds by geometrical progression: each new reading builds upon whatever the reader has read before.*
>
> (Manguel, 1996, p.19).

All the English teams recognised the need to consolidate basic skills by boosting the reading experience of their underachieving new pupils. Often in partnership with their special needs colleagues, they too organised paired reading schemes to match experienced and adept readers with underachievers in Key Stage 3. This provision could seldom be timetabled; it was an extra and voluntary activity and consequently varied in its frequency. There was no evidence of unnecessary duplication between SEN and English colleagues. Several departments made a special point of recruiting capable older boys to pair with younger and weaker ones, sometimes with dramatically positive effects.

To support pupils of all abilities to the end of Key Stage 4, many English departments also built a regular period of silent reading into their timetables. The time that was reserved varied between schools; some began each lesson with ten minutes of silent reading, some gave it one lesson a week. Most had also established a simple form of reading record for pupils to maintain; it allowed teachers to monitor choices and make new suggestions. On an occasional basis, some schools encouraged pupils to share this reading in whole class lessons with snappily written book reviews for a teenage readership, with oral reviews and with video presentations. The organisation of book clubs and book purchasing schemes helped to reinforce this emphasis and to give pupils pleasure in the possession of books.

Inevitably, there was an overlap between structured occasions for silent reading and reading as a leisure activity. In general, the effect was to boost voluntary reading. Some schools, through the school library's computer software, were able to monitor the effects of their encouragement. A clear measure of effectiveness was found if the borrowing patterns – which are often lively in Years 7 and 8 – were actively maintained in Year 9, and especially into Years 10 and 11. With some library software it is also possible to monitor borrowing both by gender and individually.

Teaching advanced reading skills

> *The illusion that the teaching of reading is the concern solely of the infant school should be dispelled, and in a most positive way.*
> (Walker, 1974, p.12.).

In most survey schools English teachers paid closely planned attention to the advanced reading skills specified in the National Curriculum. Inspection experience suggests that their systematic attention – combined with the clarity of the approaches used – is still relatively unusual. A thread of common practice lay in their deployment of a number of techniques that may be used with pupils of widely varying abilities. These were the Directed Activities Related to Texts (DARTS) whose effectiveness was evaluated and promoted by Nottingham University nearly two decades ago (Lunzer and Gardner, 1979; 1984). Their worth is gaining recognition once again. The techniques include group prediction and deletion activities and will not be described in detail here (but see Annex 2). Walker contrasted these approaches with the traditional test of comprehension. He noted that the reading practices underpinning advanced skills are:

> *Forward-looking, anticipatory and predictive, active and questioning, and the attitudes essential to reading of this order are unlikely to be developed by backward-looking procedures where reading is reduced to passivity and mere recall by questions which are asked when all has been revealed.* (Walker, 1974, p.19.).

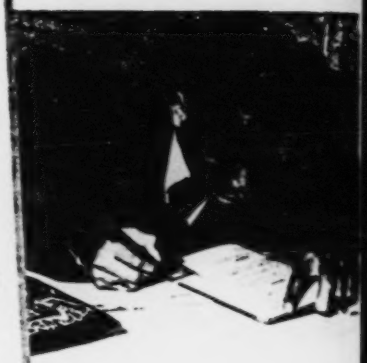
It is no surprise that, with their variety and their strong element of discussion, such approaches could be made to appeal strongly to boys.

Even in the survey schools, with some exceptions, the use of such active techniques for handling texts was largely confined to English departments. However, it is plain that they are equally applicable to all subjects that require pupils to read effectively. A whole school policy for promoting boys' achievements in particular, or literacy in general, would benefit by using them widely.

These techniques may also assist pupils whose basic skills are weak. However, it was far more difficult for English departments to provide direct instruction in basic skills to pupils who, usually owing to limited resources, did not qualify for SEN help. In this regard, the constraints of the national curriculum and of the secondary school timetable, as well as limitations in the availability and expertise of staff all played a part.

Case Study VII

11-18 comprehensive school
A Y8 Reading and Research Course



Offered to all Y8 pupils for 1 lesson per week. Devised and taught by the English department.

Aim of course

To support the continuing reading development of pupils by making them aware of:

- differing types of text and how they are constructed
- appropriate strategies to meet the reading task
- reading as a research skill and a tool of learning
- appropriate note-taking and summary methods; the relationship of reading to the writing task.

To foster:

- a love of reading, especially of fiction, for its own sake
- the independent learner.

The course recognises the entitlement which pupils have to continuing teaching in the area of reading skills and their need to access text efficiently and sometimes independently as part of their experience of the whole curriculum.

The course will provide specific guidance on: **reading strategies,** give a variety of **reading experiences** in a supported situation, broaden pupils' **choices in fiction** and foster **a climate where the pupil interrogates the text** in order to make meaning and to learn. Over the three terms, key skills such as research reading will be introduced and revisited in appropriate contexts. Homework will be used to reinforce learning where appropriate.

The broad areas for the three terms are:

Autumn Term: A Reading Programme and Study Skills

Spring Term: Text Types and DARTs

Summer Term: The World of Fiction, including analytical techniques.

In addition, reading awards (for completed fiction) are offered to students. Detailed plans have been drafted for the teaching of each lesson in the course. Next year staff from other subjects will join in its teaching.

The testing of students before and after the course suggests clearly that substantial gains in reading age have been made.

Explicit attention to structure

The English departments in the survey took unusual care with planning and with the presentation of their lessons. Matching their own overall organisation, they placed strong emphasis on the self-organisation of their pupils and on supporting them with adopting structured approaches to thinking, and to writing in particular. Several departments were in schools where teaching method had been the subject of school-wide priority setting. Favourable comments in Ofsted reports had often been made on their classroom organisation and effectiveness.

In addition to the characteristics listed under whole school approaches, some key features of work in English that helped boys included:

- *short structured tasks with clear targets and deadlines;*

- *non-confrontational approaches to discipline;*
- *praise in public and rebuke in private;*
- *beginning with analytical tasks, before discussing feelings or empathy;*
- *storyboards and similar analytical and planning techniques adopted from media studies;*
- *approaching literary texts from the standpoint of media studies e.g. comparing different film versions of key scenes in Macbeth as a way into the text;*
- *offering media studies as an alternative option to English Literature in GCSE;*

- *offering English Language as an alternative to English Literature at A-Level;*
- *the frequent use of DARTs - as above;*
- *finding plenty of room for discussion;*
- *giving a prominent place to non-literary materials (newspapers in particular);*
- *offering systematic prompts to assist with re-drafting;*
- *the use of photocopied scripts for editing exercises, both with the whole class and in groups;*
- *a Y10 non-narrative writing assignment based on a discussion of recent national statistics for GCSE English* (and the contrasting performances of boys and girls that are revealed);
- *an English department diary for all KS3 pupils (to promote self-organisation, self-review, to monitor reading and display evidence of progress);*
- *planned opportunities for the use of IT (including in one case the use of a portable suite of lap-top computers with the whole class);*
- *emphasising collaborative approaches to learning;*
- *building well-conceived elements of drama into the teaching regime;*
- *brainstorming and allied planning and discussion techniques.*

In addition, several English departments had been prompted by Exeter University's EXEL project to develop a range of new techniques and strategies for helping pupils to structure their written work. In particular, they adapted the principles of the 'Writing Frame' for a wide range of English assignments; these included both note-making and more continuous writing in a variety of genres (see Annex 2).

Case Study VIII

11-16 comprehensive school

Contents page of English Diary for all KS3 pupils.

INTRODUCTION

- Welcome to the booklet that is going to improve your English work – if you use it properly!
- It will help you to work with your teacher so that you can be responsible for your own learning. It will be a record of the work you do in English until the end of Year 9 and the progress you make.

CONTENTS

1. Planning and drafting your work
2. Drafting checklists
3. Creative writing record sheet
4. Records and reviews
5. Spelling dictionary
6. Have you read?
7. Reading record
8. Private reading activities
9. Speaking and listening

Ethos and expectations

When asked directly how they had brought about their successes with boys, two or three Heads of English found it difficult at first to answer. They saw most of the effective planning and lesson preparation that has been noted above as matters of course. When pressed, they attributed their successes less to specific measures than to their general awareness of boys' attitudes, to the classroom ethos created by their teams and to the expectations both of attainment, presentation and behaviour that they consistently maintained. In one of these examples, the gap between boys and girls in GCSE English (around 15% nationally) had been closed to about 7% in their latest results and 83% of the entry had gained grades A*-C; the award of higher grades in English Literature was better still.

Boys' interests and preferences

Most of the effective practice described above was also underpinned by teaching materials that had been selected with an eye to boys' tastes and interests. This was seldom the chief strategy for raising boys' achievements, but was an important part of the armoury. Schools made it acceptable for boys to read non-fiction, promoted fiction with them and selected materials with a strong appeal for them. In particular, to support the sessions of planned silent reading noted above, their strategies included boys' book boxes and thematic and genre-related book collections (e.g. horror, science-fiction, X-files analogues and fantasy, myth and teen-age problem stories); collections by Terry Pratchett were especially popular. English departments and school librarians worked together to ensure that boys' interests were met in both their sets of collections. In addition, to support the voluntary reading of pupils with special needs and of underachieving readers in general, collections of attractive books of low readability were placed on open shelves in the library; no stigma appeared to be attached to their use.

There was one significant difficulty: many heads of department were dismayed by the change of direction in set-book selection for GCSE that has followed recent adjustments to the National Curriculum for English. They noted that an increased emphasis on pre-twentieth century literature had been particularly prejudicial for boys of below average attainment and motivation.

Groupings

Two schools had experimented with single-sex classes for English and several of the other heads of department were emphatic concerning the principles underlying their own grouping systems. Across the sample, entirely opposing principles were adopted, but the schools found that what they had attempted appeared to work effectively.

Both the single sex pilots had tried the system with one year group; each felt sufficiently encouraged to carry the pilot forward for at least one more year. On a point of logistics, both felt that they could not have embarked on their experiments so readily had the numbers of boys and girls not been nearly equal in their chosen year groups. Both schools set pupils by ability in English. Both also consulted parents before beginning their pilots. They monitored pupils' responses closely; but it will be some time before they can be certain of their outcomes in terms of achievements in national tests or public examinations. After one year, both schools now plan to modify their arrangements: they will broaden the ability range of their upper sets in particular. In one case, after polling the pupils' preferences, top sets will revert to a mixed sex grouping while middle and lower sets will retain their single sex organisation. The school notes that the year of single sex teaching had improved the achievements of abler boys enabling them to join mixed top sets in numbers that are more equal with girls.

Contrasting mixed ability and mixed sex groupings were used with equal success. In one school where mixed ability teaching is used, mixed gender seating arrangements are emphasised in English as a matter of explicit policy. It is a school where GCSE English results are well above the national average and the gap between boys' and girls' achievements much narrower than the national picture.

The survey evidence does not resolve the arguments for or against single or mixed gender grouping arrangements. The conviction with which a particular form of organisation is used appears to be much more important.

Conclusions

THIS survey suggests that there is no magic bullet, no quick measures that take immediate effect with boys' literacy. However, it also suggests a number of firm and positive messages: in particular, the survey schools took clear measures to address a problem and they made a difference.

One of the clearest ***whole school messages*** must be that carefully conceived policies to identify and target underachievement can also work well for boys' literacy. Policies directed towards an overall raising of literacy levels can be effective too; they usually benefit boys in particular. An enhanced awareness of the needs of boys is similarly important; it is especially effective where it is reflected into the daily practices of subject departments. Measures specifically directed towards boys' interests and preferences can also be helpful, but they are less likely to be adequate in the absence of more overarching policies concerned, for example, with teaching quality across the school.

When he enters the secondary school, the boy with poor basic literacy is acutely disadvantaged. First he must catch up and then he must keep up. But the National Curriculum is a set of moving targets: it makes new demands on his first day and proceeds on a steep upward curve. Two messages were especially clear to the ***special needs teams*** in the survey schools.

- ***Rapid progress with basic literacy is essential in the secondary school.*** It is likely to require intensive teaching early in Key Stage 3.

- Using a variety of strategies, the skills which the poor reader is taught need ***well co-ordinated reinforcement.*** In particular, the skills need to be practised and progress needs to be prompted and praised in a partnership between home and school.

English departments are concerned with the whole ability range. The most effective were clear in their objectives, explicit in their emphasis on teaching and practising the skills of literacy and tightly organised in the classroom. In particular, they were teams that were aware of the

needs of boys and had established an ethos of high and consistent expectations. They had adopted a developmental and self-monitoring approach to their work.

Two schools were moving towards policies that involved ***all departments*** in taking practical daily account of the particular kinds of literacy demanded by their own subjects. It is a logical extension of what is described in this report. In combination with what has already been noted, it holds out the prospect of further significant gains for boys and girls alike.

Beyond the control of the individual department are ***overarching matters*** of the organisation and resources needed to enhance the literacy of boys. Setting arrangements for one department should not determine those for another subject; splitting classes between two or more teachers is unhelpful to continuity, especially for weak groups; and effective withdrawal arrangements for intensive literacy teaching need the strong support of the senior management team. Where resources hinder the SEN team from addressing all but the severest cases, secondary school English departments that attempt to teach the skills specified for Key Stages 1 and 2 are likely to experience difficulties with timetabling, with staff expertise and with materials. In addition, as Ofsted has recently reported, 'poor provision of books adversely affects standards' in one in six English departments (Ofsted, 1997, p.5).

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ANNEX I

Participating schools

Acklam Grange School, Lodore Grove, Middlesborough, TS5 8BP.

Alcester High School, Gerard Road, Alcester, Warwickshire, B49 6QQ.

Archbishop Ilsley RC High School, Victoria Road, Birmingham, B27 7XY.

Arrow Vale High School, Greensward Lane, Redditch, B98 0EN.

Arthur Mellows Village College, Helpston Road, Glinton, Peterborough, PE6 7JX.

Arthur Terry School, Kittoe Road, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham, B74 4RZ.

Ash Green School, Ash Green Lane, Coventry, Warwickshire, CV7 9AH.

Chantry High School, Martley, Worcester, WR6 6QA.

Henry Beaufort School, East Woodhay Road, Harestock, Winchester, Hampshire, SO22 6JI.

King James School, St Helen's Gate, Almondbury, Huddersfield, HD4 6SG.

Lings School, Billing Brook Road, Northampton, NN3 4NH.

Newsome High School, Castle Avenue, Huddersfield, HD4 6JN.

Sackville School, Lewes Road, East Grinstead, West Sussex, RH19 3TY.

St Benedict's RC High School, Alcester, Warwickshire, B49 6PX.

ANNEX 2

DARTS and writing frames

DARTS

Almost any activity designed to prompt an interrogative approach to reading may be regarded as a DART (Directed Activity Related to Text). It is essential, however, that DARTS should be used as group discussion activities; if pupils are left to work alone the DART is transformed into a test instead of a learning activity. Some of the more common activities are listed below.

Group Prediction

A story or passage is divided into instalments. This is a discussion activity in which group members are asked to predict what will happen next. Pupils each make and defend their predictions before moving on to the next instalment together. Strongly marked narrative materials work well. Many folk tales and some stories by Saki and by James Thurber make a good introduction to using the technique.

Group Deletion

Often effective with pairs of pupils, followed by a whole class review. Passages are issued in which words have been missed out, but where the gaps are shown. The omissions may be random (e.g. every 10th word), or targeted. The pairs are asked to discuss what might fill the gaps. It is a technique that is adaptable to a wide variety of uses and may be used both at an elementary and a sophisticated level. For example, when plausible alternatives are offered by pupils, they may be used to initiate a discussion of style. Targeted deletions can also be used for teaching grammatical and other concepts.

SQ3R

This is a systematic approach to handling a passage of text in class and can be especially useful with information texts and argument. S is for Skim; Q is for Questions i.e. the questions that, after skimming, occur to the pupils, or are posed by their teacher; 3R is for the reading activities that follow: Read closely; Recite, i.e. say what you have now understood; Review and compare findings around the class. In one of the survey schools this technique was regularly used by several subject departments.

Other DARTS

Other DARTS include colour-coding and highlighting, underlining, placing sub-headings in the margin of a passage, sequencing (i.e. re-assembling a text that has been cut up and jumbled), transforming passages of text into diagrams and flow-charts, re-writing a text for a distinctly different readership, extracting key sentences, summary activities and so on. Further details will be found in the books by Lunzer and Gardner and in Elizabeth Plackett's handbook on reading policy (Plackett, 1995) shown in the list of references.

Writing Frames

These were disseminated by the Exeter Extending Literacy Project (EXEL). They are means of supporting pupils in undertaking a wide variety of non-narrative and non-fiction writing tasks. In essence, teachers are encouraged explicitly to teach the writing genres they require pupils to use. In particular, writing frames involve teachers in

modelling and providing pupils with structures, or scaffolds, for the writing tasks that they set. Their objective is to assist pupils in developing independence when organising their writing across a range of tasks and genres. Eventually, the frames may be discarded.

The frames themselves may take a variety of forms. They commonly comprise a set of sentence stems which pupils complete and around which they may shape a piece of discursive or informative writing, or develop a line of argument. Note making may be similarly assisted by stems and/or by the provision of grids and boxes that help with the structuring of ideas and the gathering of evidence. The EXEL project was aimed mostly at older pupils in the junior school, but the principles and techniques may be applied up to Key Stages 3 and 4 and beyond, including A-Level in most subjects. Writing frames are particularly helpful for prompting pupils to use the vocabulary of argument and reasoning – therefore, because, an important piece of evidence is, since, this shows/suggests that, as a consequence, you can see . . .

Further information may be found in Writing Frames by Maureen Lewis and David Wray, details of which are given in the references section, and in eight working papers produced by the Exeter University team – these also contain further suggestions for DARTS.

ANNEX 3

Pyramid projects

Liaison between the staffs of secondary schools and their primary school colleagues was at an early stage in two survey schools.

A joint reading and writing project

One secondary school was developing a joint reading and writing project with the primary schools from which the bulk of its pupils come. Together, the schools involved had the active support of their LEA, for whom they were piloting the project. The project involved pupils in:

- *a programme of text handling activities. This included looking at differences between fiction and non-fiction, looking at some simple non-fiction genres, employing systematic approaches for looking at texts (DARTS);*

- *an autobiography project. Reading common texts, using a common analytical framework for discussion, using an agreed writing frame for analysis. With the help of a writing frame, the project also helped pupils to investigate their own family histories and ultimately to write an autobiographical piece of their own. Pupils drafted in Key Stage 2 what they would complete on transfer to Key Stage 3;*

- *a variety of writing frames, a range of non-fiction and fiction genres, texts from a range of cultures and periods, including pre-twentieth century texts, research activities using a variety of written sources to investigate 'the decade when I was born'.*

A pyramid working group on gender and achievement

The second school had established a pyramid working group on gender and achievement. Seven schools were involved, including the secondary school that had taken the initiative. Key features of the project included:

- *a preliminary conference at which the schools shared their perspectives on boys' behaviour and achievements;*

- *the establishment of a working group whose declared aim is 'to make a difference' and prompt the development of a 'more caring masculinity';*

- *a regular newsletter and meetings;*
- *action-research projects by each participating school.*

Initiative	*Investigation*
Shared reading	Nature of classroom materials and their relative attraction for boys and girls
Shared reading	Close analysis of SATs results and other test data
Shared reading	Lunchtime behaviour
Single sex groups	Attitudes to work among Y6 pupils
Single sex groups	Use of playground space
Single sex groups	Teachers' attitudes towards boys and girls
Tracking high achieving Y8 boys	The experience of high achieving Y11 boys

Further investigations have included homework, and gender issues in PSE lessons. The schools report that they have already been able to collate information from interviews with boys and that several have begun to modify their materials, teaching approaches and topics in the light of what they have found. 'Within all the schools *there is little doubt that discussions have fed into a declared intention to raise the profile of literacy across the pyramid.* We are moving into a home/school partnership in literacy from year one.'

ANNEX 4

The school library

There is no doubt that the school library is important in supporting policies for the development of literacy in general and among boys in particular. Effective libraries in the sample schools displayed five common strengths:

- *an energetic librarian;*
- *close liaison between the English department, the special needs team and the librarian;*
- *a library training programme for pupils that involves study skills and research skills;*
- *well judged stocks;*
- *the involvement of the library in school-wide curriculum developments.*

Notes on the library in a 13-18 school

The library gives every appearance of being an exceptionally well-run asset. The experienced but non-qualified librarian is the driving force. Among the library's strengths for boys and for literacy in general are:

- *a well selected stock;*
- *an exceptionally effective signposting system, including book finding posters;*
- *a strong provision of paperbacks, mostly at the popular end of the market;*

- *an attractive library environment – shelving, seating, display;*
- *the substantial provision on open shelves of speed readers (i.e. simplified texts for poor readers);*
- *the provision of computers in the library attracts boys;*
- *boys are the heaviest lunch hour users of the library and use it responsibly – they not only use the computers, but are heavy users of the newspapers and the non-fiction and reference books, including some daunting tomes;*
- *the provision of study carrels encourages private study – lots of effective PS seen during the visit;*
- *a multi-media collection that includes videos for loan to pupils.*

Notes on the library in an 11-16 school

- *a major cull of stocks has left raw book numbers on the low side (book-to-pupil ratio of 7:1), but has left a stock that is on the whole well adapted for a wide range of pupils;*
- *recent purchases have emphasised accessible non-fiction texts and attractive fiction;*
- *lively display and sign-posting;*
- *evidence of active liaison with the English department;*
- *good help reported to be available from the local education authority's school library service (SLS);*
- *the provision of a book club, aided by SLS;*
- *borrowing habits and patterns are monitored through the library computer;*
- *computers are available in the library for pupils and are responsibly used.*

The Basic Skills Agency

The Basic Skills Agency is the national development agency for basic skills in England and Wales and is funded mainly by the Government. However, we are an independent organisation and a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. We are a not-for-profit organisation.

Our Patron is Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal. The Director of the Agency is Alan Wells OBE.

The mission of the Basic Skills Agency is to:

'promote continuing improvement in the basic skills of the population of England and Wales.'

We have four main aims.

1. To promote the importance, and increase knowledge of, basic skills and encourage an increase in the take-up of provision.
2. To initiate and support the development of basic skills provision.
3. To improve the effectiveness of basic skills programmes and teaching.
4. To improve the efficiency of our central services and support and make the most effective use of the expertise of staff.

For further information contact

The Basic Skills Agency
Commonwealth House
1-19 New Oxford Street
London WC1A 1NU
Tel: 0171-405 4017
Fax: 0171-440 6626
www.basic-skills.co.uk

Reg. Charity No. 1003969

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